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Walk No. 19

Montreal inside Chinatown out

By BETTY GUERNSEY

One of everybody's favorite districts in Chinatown — a tiny area of six-odd blocks which serves as the cultural and commercial centre for Montreal's Chinese population.

To the average Montrealer, it's the best place to go for a Chinese meal; but to Chinese it's contact with their roots. Dry goods and grocery stores, churches, community centres, professional associations, and the legendary family associations going back hundreds of years.

Every city which drew a large population of Chinese laborers developed its own Chinatown — notably San Francisco, which boasts North America's largest and oldest, dating from the mid 1800's — followed by New York and Vancouver. London has one; although oddly enough Paris, which is noted for having the most luxurious and sophisticated Chinese restaurants in the world, doesn't have a Chinese quarter as such.

Montreal's Chinatown began in the 1860s, when the first Chinese emigrated to California and B.C. to work on the railways, and trickled their way eastward. Nearly all of them came from the southern province of Kwang Tung, whose capital, Canton, was the only port through which foreign trade was permitted. And all were men. Until almost 1950, Canadian laws forbade the entry of Chinese women. Only diplomats, clergymen and merchants were allowed to bring their families with them.

In the past 25 years Montreal's Chinese community has multiplied dramatically, from 1,000 to an estimated 30,000. Part of this is an influx of people from the Mainland, the People's Republic of China.

Guide for our walk is Shanghai-born Dick Chen, one of the newer wave of immigrants who came to Canada seven years ago.

A mechanical aircraft engineer by profession, Chen comes from a family of chefs, and learned to cook by watching his father, whom he believes to be one of the greatest. As a result he, too, ended up as a chef when the Shanghai Restaurant opened on Bleury a few years ago and needed someone who could cook Shanghai-style. For the past year he has taught cooking, Chinese painting and Mandarin conversation at his own school on Victoria Avenue.

"All the restaurants in Chinatown are basically Cantonese, or Southern style," explained Dick. "You'll find restaurants serving Northern-style Shanghai or Peking cooking, which is spicier, but they're not in Chinatown itself." Example: the **Shanghai** (1) on Bleury below Dorchester, where Chen began his career as a chef, lies just outside the boundaries of Chinatown. (Others are the **Peking Garden** at 103 Ste. Catherine E., and the **Chinese Tea House** at 1127A Ste. Catherine W., downstairs from the China Pagoda boutique.) One of the Shanghai's dishes is the famous Mongolian fire pot, some of Chen's paintings decorate the walls.

Not part of Chinatown, but intriguing to say the least is the **Southern Building** at 1070 Bleury (2), built about 60 years ago, with its splendid gargoyled façade.

"Hardly any Chinese actually live in Chinatown anymore," says Dick as we turn onto Lagauchetiere. "Mostly old people, waiters, and newly-arrived immigrants — although thousands of Chinese work in Chinatown every day and live in other parts of the city."

Lagauchetiere, one of the main arteries of Chinatown, was named for Daniel Migeon, Sieur de La Gauchetiere (1671-1746), to whose family the property was ceded by the Sulpicians in 1665. Many of the houses along the street were built in the 1880s.

At the corner of Chenneville we see one of Chinatown's three churches: the **Chinese Catholic Church** (3), formerly the French-Canadian Notre-Dame-des-Anges, which now sports Chinese red doors and trim. Behind it in the courtyard on Chenneville was at one time a Chinese school.

Across the street, with the pagoda top, is the **Chinese Presbyterian Church and Community Centre** (4) at 1077 Chenneville. This church is interesting for a number of reasons: it stands on the former site of the **Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue**, which was erected in 1838, when Montreal's Jewish population numbered about 100, and was the only synagogue in British North America at the time.

The Chinese Presbyterian, Montreal's first Chinese Christian church, was founded in the 1890s by the father of the present rector, Rev. Paul Chan. This particular building was erected in 1949 (note the Chinese cornerstone).

Immediately north of it was a former Protestant cemetery which in 1871 became **Dufferin Square** — at one time, extremely beautiful.

Chinatown's third church, the **Chinese Pentecostal** (5) is also the newest, where the newly-arrived Mandarin-speaking Chinese tend to go. Its neighbors are the **Chong Wah Noodle Manufacturing Co.** at 185 Lagauchetiere and the **Sun Shang** wholesale tobacco firm at 179.

All these buildings between Dorchester, Jeanne Mance, de Vitre and St. Urban are under the shadow of demolition for a multi-million-dollar federal government-planned office complex. **Place Guy Favreau**, which many people feel could have been planned elsewhere in order to leave the spiritual heart of Chinatown intact. The cost of relocating, with land and construction prices zooming, will be exorbitantly expensive for these churches and small businesses.

To our right is (6) the **Wing Noodle** factory, Chinatown's largest employer, which manufacturers many of the Chinese foods you see in supermarkets. Owned by Marcel Wong, a first-generation Chinese Canadian whose mother was French-Canadian, it has been a Chinatown landmark for over 25 years.

Continuing east along Lagauchetiere we see the yellow sign of **Kum Ying Trading Company** (7) at 112, whose owner Ying Tam came to Canada in 1968. Note the Kung Fu shoes ($8.50), Kong Kong pears ($1.20 lb.) and Lung Ching, Canton's finest green tea ($4.95). Next door is **Dr. Suke-Yen Lai**, Chinatown's only doctor.

Star Book Store (8) at 104 Lagauchetiere carries books and periodicals, stationery, cards and postcards from Hong Kong and the People's Republic, as well as Chinese newspapers from places such as Toronto, Vancouver and San Francisco.

Around the corner on St. Urbain is (9) **Hee-Lum-Mon Restaurant**, a former private home with a fascinating rounded front, which serves some mildly-curried dishes, and **Hong Kong Tailor** (10) where Cheung Woon Ting makes men's and women's Western or Chinese-style clothes to order. (A brocade cheongsam would cost about $85.)

Back on Lagauchetiere is (11) Chinatown's largest gift shop, **China Arts and Crafts**, selling colorful china Buddhas, fans, scrolls, Chinese paintings, jade and ivory. **China-Teen Trading** at 93 has excellent homemade bean curd ($1.30 dozen), and more than 12 kinds of Dim Sum pastries, made daily, 30-40 each.

The best day to visit Chinatown is Sunday, when Chinese families from all over town come to attend church, meet their friends, and have "Dim Sum" — teacakes of pork, beef, shrimp, crab, vegetables or sweetmeats covered with dumpling — traditionally served on Sundays between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. in many Chinatown restaurants. Chinese groceries are allowed to open on Sundays, too, mainly because the type of products they sell doesn't compete with other grocery stores.

Look up to the second and third stories of these buildings with their Kong Kong-style balconies and gold-lettered Chinese signs: these are the **Tongs**, or family societies, that divide the Chinese community up by surname: for example, the Lee Association at 94, the Hum at 90, and the Wong at 76.

At 84 we see **Wing Tai Chong** dry goods, where you'll find everything from abacuses and fortune cookies to Chinese lanterns and Christmas stocking-stuffers such as porcelain fish to rest chopsticks on. Also along here are **Kuen Lick** at 78 with chicken, duck and Chinese groceries; **Sunya Restaurant** at 74, and **Sun Sing Ling** grocery at 72A. In Chen's opinion, this last does the best barbecued pork and duck in Chinatown — they'll also chop chicken and duck livers for takeout.

Unfortunately there are no prices on their merchandise — very bad for comparison shopping. Upstairs at 70 is the **Tai Sun Restaurant**; and at 62, the **Jasmine Café**.

On the north side of Lagauchetiere (12) are the **Chinatown Post Office** and stationery, open Sundays, and an impressive lineup of restaurants including the **Rickshaw** at 83, open 24 hours a day (they serve Chinese breakfast); **Lung Fung** upstairs at 81, noted for its Sunday Dim Sum; the **Cathay** at 73; **Sun Kuo Min** at 67; **Jade Garden** at 57; and the **New Lotus** at the corner of Clark. (My own observation: If you find a restaurant you really like, reveal it only to your nearest and dearest. Bitten by success, some Chinatown restaurants have doubled their size, glamourized their decor, hired twice the number of staff and dressed them in fancy jackets, put flashy plstic signs outside, and perhaps it's an illusion, but neither the food nor the restaurant ever seem the same again.)

Also worth noting are the People's Republic **Chinese Freemasons Society**, hung with red and gold banners, at 69; and **Sun Kun Wo**, one of the smaller groceries, at 62.

Possibly the oldest existing and most unique restaurant in Chinatown is the **Nanking** (13) at the corner of Clark and Lagauchetiere. A landmark since the early '30s, it's famous for its old-fashioned private cubicles.

Turning right on Clark we encounter (14) **Van Kew Importing**, offering items such as Chinese toothbrushes, tea sets, and Mao jackets, padded or unpadded. **A&S Noodles (Wing Fung)** at 108, where you can buy ready-made skins for won ton (2 lb. $1) and egg roll (2 lb. 99¢), and **Sun Ngai Hong** at 984, a grocery and general trading company with records and books in a back room, and all types of fresh and canned groceries, including frozen yellow fish from China, and dark feet. They carry ginseng — at about $25 a piece.

Crossing the street, we see (15) **Leong Jung** at 999 Clark, a Chinese supermarket which was started as a small grocery store some 60 years ago by the father and uncle of the present owners, whose family name is Lee.

One of the most complete and organized of Chinatown's groceries, it has almost everything the Chinese cook could ask for: Fresh winter melon, Chinese lettuce and cabbage, salty and thousand-year eggs, ginger root, dried salted duck and pork, their own Chinese sausage made on the premises, sharks' fins, jelly fish, dried squid, bamboo leaves, canned sweets, nuts, teas, kitchen equipment such as woks, cleavers, ladles, bamboo steamers, automatic rice steamers, etc.

And, like most Chinese groceries, they have a medicine section of roots and remedies. ("Very expensive," says Chen, pointing to sea horse as an example, at $150 lb. "Only old people buy them.")

At 1023 Clark is (16) the **Sun-Sun Restaurant**, one of the best-known in Chinatown, dating back some 25 years, and at the corner of Clark, **Welcome Café**, the smallest, plainest and cheapest. **Taan Hong**, which was upstairs between the two, has moved around the corner to 19 Lagauchetiere W.

Proceed up Clark, passing another Chinatown landmark, the pagoda-style telephone booth at Clark and Lagauchetiere. To our right (17) is the **Chinatown bulletin board**, which substitutes for the newspaper Montreal's Chinese quarter doesn't have, announcing meetings, films, and general news; the **Chinese Nationalist League** at 1101, and a few small dry goods and grocery stores, including **George Chan's Gifts and dry Goods** at the corner of Dorchester, with attractive demi-tasse cups, Mah-Jong sets, and water pipes.

On the west side of the street (18) are **Kiu Sing** grocery at 1098, with its barbecued birds and pork — the signs hanging in the window are help-wanted advertisements; the new **Van Wah Restaurant** upstairs at 1088; **Sun Ko Wah Oriental Boutique** with costume jewellery, Chinese-English and Chinese-French dictionaries (about $10), and super Chinese Christmas cards; and another new restaurant, the **Peninsula**.

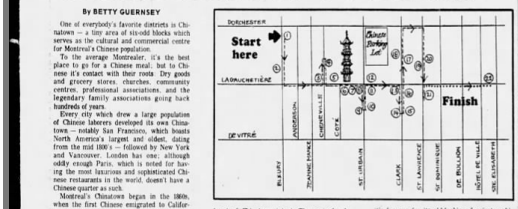
Go east along Dorchester, then turn down St. Lawrence, which has attracted an increasing number of Chinese businesses, including (19) Richard Chan's **Canadian Chop Suey Co.**, suppliers of bean sprouts to many of Montreal's Chinese restaurants; the recently-opened **Chung & Jee** grocery, packed with canned goods; and the famous **Ledee Café**, a Chinese-style nightclub popular with Main rubby-dubs.

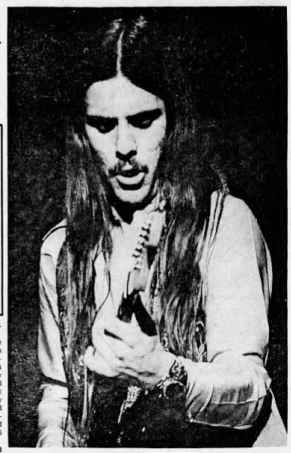
For Chinese desserts, try **Fong Wong Pastry** (20) at 1057 St. Lawrence, owned by Canadian-born Lee Fong, who makes honey cakes, honey buns, lotus and black bean cakes, incredibly good almond cookies, and 600 moon cakes a week — a plain one at $1.30, and one with egg at $1.85. Next door is a fairly new restaurant, **Wong Kung**, which has one of the widest selections of Chinese desserts and pastries in Chinatown.

Ta Ching Trading Co. (21), formerly on Lagauchetiere, has moved to large new supermarket-style premises at 1023, with all types of groceries and handicrafts. Upstairs is the brand new **Joy Inn Restaurant**. Not Chinese-owned, but fascinating nonetheless, is the **International Tattooing Studio** at 1011.

And that's about the end of Chinatown, except the proposed site of the new **Chinese Pentecostal Church** at the corner of Lagauchetiere and de Bullion and one lone Chinese laundry (22) at 229 Lagauchetiere E.

Merry Christmas!





Franke Marino, lead singer-guitarist, Mahogany Rush.

No longer a game for Mahogany Rush

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

Mahogany Rush, the Montreal trio that's made further inroads into the global rock scene than any other, makes its first local appearance in 18 months at the Forum tomorrow night.

It is only the second hometown concert for the group in three years, during which they've garnered a solid reputation as an up-and-coming "superstar" act.

Mahogany's style is keynoted by the electric guitar pyrotechnics of leader Franke Marino, the man-child who — the legend goes — transcended a bummer LSD trip when he was 14 to arrive at a style astonishingly like that of the late Jimi Hendrix. This similarity has been the group's main claim to fame and its notoriety (it is generally agreed that Marino is the premier Hendrix-styled guitarist around) but over the years the 21-year-old has developed approaches of his own, leading to the group's virtually assured superstardom.

Not nervous

Marino estimates the group has performed about 150 concerts this year, most of them in the U.S., to audiences ranging in number from 10,000 to 65,000.

"I'm not as nervous anymore. In the old days, we'd buy a special wardrobe, or a new bubble machine, for each gig. Now they're all the same. It's not a game anymore, it's a profession."

It's a profession in which Marino's style — "the Hendrix thing" — has irked several of the star groups that Mahogany Rush has opened shows for. In fact, the politics of working out a reputation on the first half of concerts is considerably rougher than most fans realize.

Manfred Mann shares billing

"The policies of treating opening acts is this: Make them look as bad as you can. In others words: Don't give them the lights, the room, the time or the sound check. The British bands are particularly like this."

However, Mahogany Rush was just too hot to handle for Black Sabbath when the two did concerts together on the West Coast last fall.

"After we played our Sacramento gig, Black Sabbath didn't do their show. They played for one number, got no reaction, and then announced that they had amplifier trouble. They walked off stage, the crowd waited for an hour and a half and started calling for us again. I offered Sabbath my amps but they wouldn't take them. It went like that for the six dates we did with them, including the taping of Rock Concert. I said to myself, 'What a great band to play with!' They draw all these big crowds, they're on the way down, and so we end up taking all their people."

How has Marino maintained his creative juices throughout the mystique and controversy of his guitar style?

"It used to be a problem for me. When we first went to the States, I was resting on my laurels. I realized when I was working on our third album, Strange Universe, that I have to get down and work, and never mind about all this party bull.

"Before, when I used to see groups at the Forum, I used to hear people ask, 'Where's the party?' There always seemed to be a party. But when I went on tour, I heard people ask me the same thing, but there was no party. Imagine partying after every show — you'd blow yourself to hell."

As for the future, Marino is full of expectations. Mahogany Rush is considering moving to a larger record label and the group may expand with a keyboardist and percussionist, as bassist Paul Harwood may well be enrolling in a music school to expand his craft. Drummer Jimmy Ayoub completes the current trio.

New direction

The group is currently working in town on a fourth album, one that Marino says is "taking another direction. Every record we do seems to turn out different. This one will have a 22-minute number based on the myth of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse."

As for tomorrow's concert, he says that the opening act, Manfred Mann, "cannot be blown off the stage. Let me assure you that they're an excellent band."

"I'm trying to make this one as Christmassy as possible. It's going to be filled with surprises — I might have Santa Claus walk on stage hurling out giant paper joints."

And, on Dec. 23, Marino and cohorts will entertain at the Ste. Anne maximum security prison for inmates he describes as some of his greatest fans.

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